

EPA-GE Citizen Coordinating Council
June 13, 2007
Meeting Highlights

Participants: See attached list

Introduction: Suzanne Orenstein, Facilitator, and Susan Svirsky, EPA Project Manager for Rest of River, opened the meeting with a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. CCC members added three issues to the agenda (Fred Garner Park ceremony, venue for this meeting, and questions about the Noble property sale to GE). They are addressed in the General Comments section below.

Susan Svirsky made a few announcements, namely:

- Angela Bonarrigo, the EPA Community Relations specialist, has left EPA to work in the private sector.
- Dean Tagliaferro will not attend this meeting because he is in DC receiving a gold medal from EPA for the completion of the 1.5-Mile Project.
- Jim Murphy, Angela Bonarrigo's replacement, is unable to attend this CCC meeting but will be working on the project from now on
- Skip Hull and Rich Fisher are the new EPA Remedial Project Managers for the Housatonic project replacing Sharon Hayes and Bill Lovely.

Presentation on Restoration Methods and Results

Susan Svirsky briefly introduced John Lortie of Woodlot Associates, who gave the evening's presentation on *Ecological Restoration Following a Sediment and Soil Removal*. The presentation included information on how restoration is conducted to maximize its success and three case studies of previous restoration projects.

John Lortie provided an introduction for the presentation. He covered the following topics:

- Ecological Restoration
 - Identifying restoration goals and objectives
 - Understanding and planning for existing and post remediation conditions
 - Integration of restoration with remedial action work
 - Restoration implementation and monitoring
- Case Studies
 - Loring Air Force Base – East Branch Greenlaw Brook
 - Sudbury River
 - East Branch Housatonic River

Mr. Lortie made the following major points in his presentation, and provided significant detail and description to illustrate these points. The complete version of the slides from Mr. Lortie's presentation is posted on the project web site:

<http://www.epa.gov/region01/ge/publiceventsandmeetings.html> and will be placed in the repositories on a CD.

- For restoration to be successful, goals need to be realistic. Reestablishing communities of species that were in the location prior to the remediation is key, and assuming several years for newly planted species to flourish is also important. Experience has shown that using

young stock increases the survival rate, and is a better route than using more mature stock that may not adapt as well.

- Hydrology is the driving force for planning for successful restoration. Matching species to the hydrological conditions requires excellent understanding of the ecological components.
- Establishing the existing conditions of the area to be restored is a very important first step. These conditions must be understood in detail for successful restoration. They can include characteristics of the hydrology (existing, post-remediation, and post restoration), soil characteristics, baseline ecological characteristics, and grading and elevation details. These data support prior proper planning, one of the most important elements of successful restoration efforts.
- In order to evaluate success, measurable parameters for assessment over time need to be developed up front in the restoration process. These parameters become the basis for the restoration design and for long-term monitoring post-restoration.
- Restoration construction is usually most efficiently done as a direct follow-on to the remediation, using the same construction roads and equipment when possible, to minimize the disruptions to the areas that would result from entering and preparing the construction area multiple times. This close sequencing also can make sure erosion of restoration materials is prevented or minimized.
- The case study photos presented showed three major restoration projects at various stages in the restoration process. Many showed significant success after three or four years of growth and management.
- One threat in restoring plant communities is invasive species. Restoration practices address management of invasive species very aggressively, including planting densely with species that can resist invasive species, and managing invasive plant species with chemicals when needed.

Discussion and Questions and Answers Regarding the Presentation

Q. What is the restoration planning process for the Rest of River project? The Corrective Measures Study (CMS) proposal did not seem to include much detail on restoration.

A. The existing conditions characterization was done as part of the Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA), and can be found in an Appendix to the ERA. The proposed conditions planning won't be done until the Corrective Measures are identified. In its comments on the CMS Proposal, EPA asked GE to improve its consideration of restoration in the CMS.

Q. What do you do if during monitoring you find out that the restoration didn't work?

A. The restoration needs to be redone if it fails. This can significantly add to the cost of the project, and this is a situation we try very hard to avoid. There is usually a diagnosis of the reasons for failure and evaluation of how to fix the failure without harming other areas where the restoration is successful.

Q. What happens in situations where invasive plants and species are a severe problem?

A. The Housatonic watershed has several dominant invasive species, including purple loosestrife, bittersweet, and garlic. The solutions include dense planting on non-invasives, and early aggressive treatment. The Army Corps of Engineers has guidelines for invasive species management that will be used if needed.

Q. It is disturbing to hear that use of a chemical like Roundup is a possible treatment for invasive species.

A. We don't know if it will be proposed for use in the Housatonic yet. However, it is a proven successful method for controlling invasive species.

Comment: The Nature Conservancy has been using a Roundup-type chemical to control buckthorn and other species on their properties at Kampos Bay in Stockbridge, with good success.

Q. We have read that there have been very low success rates for restored wetlands and vernal pools. One study showed only 13% success with wetlands, and lower rates for vernal pools. What does the current data show?

A. Early restoration projects had miserable success rates. They were poorly planned and techniques were not well-understood. Over time we have learned a lot, especially about hydrology, soils, monitoring and adaptive management. The study you saw was done by the National Academy of Science, and focused on the early less-successful projects, many of which were associated with highway construction projects. Regarding vernal pools, for their success a meta-population of amphibians is needed to populate them. If those meta-populations are not available, it can take a very long time for them to reestablish themselves.

Q. You showed examples of placement of woody debris in the restored river. Does woody debris rot?

A. Yes, which is what we want. As it rots, the woody debris supplies habitat to several different types of species.

Comment: You showed good examples of the restoration on the 1 ½ mile project. However, the canoe launch at Fred Garner Park is very difficult, if not impossible, to use because of the rock immediately downstream from the launch.

Response: EPA will look at that issue.

General Comments and Questions

Some CCC members commented that the recent ceremony to formally reopen Fred Garner Park should have included better community involvement. There was no press notice before hand and only 48-hour notice via e-mail. There was no mention of environmental groups during the ceremony, nor did any speak. EPA responded that there were press releases; however, the Berkshire Eagle did not publish them.

Another issue was raised about the venue for this meeting. A CCC member noted that Cranwell Resort is not a location to encourage public attendance. Later in the meeting, CCC members provided information about potential workable meeting venues in Lenox and Lee (see below).

The HRI representative asked DEP about their response to information from a former GE employee that a children's playground may be contaminated with GE waste. DEP and HRI agreed to communicate about the situation after the meeting, including a discussion of how the former employee could be contacted by DEP.

Q. Was the Agricultural Restriction on the Noble property factored into its recent sale to GE?

A. The sale was a private sale and GE can not provide any details.

Q. How did the geotextile in Silver Lake winter over?

A. We are looking at the core samples and monitoring data now. Visually, it looked as expected.

Q. What is the status of the two inflows into Silver Lake? Apparently these outfalls are unmonitored and contaminated. The characterization of these outfalls is incomplete.

A: There are three municipal outfalls that discharge into Silver Lake. The municipal outfalls are governed by the NPDES program general permit for stormwater outfalls. It is not known if the discharges are contaminated.

Q. What is the status of the investigation of inflow to Silver Lake from Springside Park?

A. DEP has received photos, deeds, pipe locations, and other information from General Electric. It will take a while for DEP to evaluate the information.

Q. What is the status of the Dorothy Amos Park project?

A. DEP noted that they have received GE's workplan for the remediation. Permitting for the work will delay it such that it is not likely that work will begin in this construction year. DEP plans to sponsor a public meeting for concerned Pittsfield residents before construction begins. Jane Winn offered to work with DEP on that meeting.

Q. Is there any further information about the Unkamet Brook flooding study being conducted by the City of Pittsfield?

A. There is no study yet. Surveying work is going on at the present.

Planning for Next Year's CCC Meetings (September 2007 through June 2008)

Suzanne Orenstein, the CCC facilitator, reminded the group that this meeting was the last until the fall. She noted that two issues will come up for discussion at the CCC in the fall: the results of the Silver Lake Pilot study, and a review of non-Rest of River progress. These topics could form the basis for a September meeting. The Corrective Measures Study will also be submitted to EPA by GE sometime over the fall. The plan is to hold two meetings, in MA and in CT, shortly after it is submitted to inform the informal public comment process on the document.

CCC members suggested the following additional topics for CCC meetings.

- A repeat of the restoration presentation for CT
- And update on Unkamet Brook
- A site tour of some kind.

Several comments and suggestions were made about engaging the public in the coming year. The following specific suggestions came out of the discussion:

- Schedule and publicize some public presentations of the restoration information presented tonight.
- Hold CCC meetings in more publicly accessible places. Locations that were mentioned included the Lenox Community Center, Cross Way Village run by the Berkshire Housing Authority, and the Old Community Center in Lee. Some members volunteered to support requests by the CCC to use these venues.
- EPA should purchase ads in the newspapers to make sure meeting notices are printed.
- Press releases need to go to the Lakeville Journal in CT, if they are not already on the distribution list.

Action Items

- EPA will post the Restoration presentation on the website and provide CD copies to the project repositories.
- EPA will look into the canoe launch issues at Fred Garner Park.

**EPA-GE Housatonic Project Citizens Coordinating Council
Attendance 6-13-07**

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